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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1399
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3488
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 002948

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [PINR](#) [ID](#)
SUBJECT: VICE PRESIDENT KALLA'S UNCERTAIN POLITICAL FUTURE

REF: A. SURABAYA 57
 1B. JAKARTA 2924
 1C. JAKARTA 2474
 1D. 06 JAKARTA 13173

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Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4(b,d).

1. (S) SUMMARY: With the 2009 presidential race heating up, the most intriguing political wild card at this stage is VP Kalla. He enjoys a reputation for dynamism, chairs Indonesia's largest political party, and--given his sometimes tricky relationship with SBY--would seemingly have motivation to make a run for the top job. In recent weeks, he has showed signs of prepping for a run. That said, Kalla may ultimately decide to mount a bid for the presidency only if compelled to--a highly plausible scenario if the President opts for a more pliable running mate or Kalla's party forces his hand. END SUMMARY.

THE WALK AND THE TALK

2. (S) In recent weeks, VP Jusuf Kalla has increasingly shown all the signs of preparing for a possible presidential campaign. The Vice President recently paid courtesy calls on all the former presidents--a traditional rite of passage of sorts for prospective candidates--and has been shaking hands and kissing babies like a man on a mission. Pol/C, who is a neighbor of the VP's, has recently noticed lines of cars parked outside the official VP residence for various receptions and other functions. The media coverage of the Vice President has ratcheted up accordingly. For his part, Kalla has done little to extinguish the flames of speculation, commenting last week that "any candidacy will be announced three months before the election." (Note: The primary election is slated to take place in mid-2009.)

3. (S) According to Golkar Deputy Treasurer Poempida Hidayatulloh, Kalla's handlers truly believe the VP should run and are preparing accordingly. While Poempida underlined that it was still far too early to speculate on whether Kalla might contest the presidency, he agreed that the Vice President was clearly laying the groundwork for a possible run. Legislator Yuddy Chrisnandi, on the other hand, had no

such inhibitions, telling poloff that he felt certain Kalla would run. On the other hand, Gembong Priyono, a key assistant to VP Kalla, told Pol/C recently that Kalla was "genuinely undecided, would not take precipitous steps and would probably wait for 2009 before any formal announcements."

WHY HE MIGHT RUN

¶4. (S) It is no secret that the brash, action-oriented Vice President from South Sulawesi and the more cerebral, deliberative President from Java have had a turbulent working relationship at times (Ref D). Dadan Irawan, a Golkar operative with ties to Kalla's camp, told poloff that the two were "at loggerheads" on a host of issues. A number of other Mission contacts have also reported that Kalla generally feels frustrated with the President and that he undoubtedly believes he could do a better job.

¶5. (S) At first blush, Kalla would seemingly be well-equipped to mount an effective electoral challenge in 2009. Widely respected for his no-nonsense, hard-charging style, many pundits and political operatives view him as the archetypal type "A" leader, especially when he is contrasted with the more deliberative--some critics would say indecisive--President Yudhoyono. Kalla is also extremely wealthy and has demonstrated a talent for navigating the murky world of Indonesian money politics. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Kalla chairs the Golkar Party, Indonesia's largest and most well organized political operation.

WHY HE MIGHT NOT RUN

¶6. (S) Every politician has a political ceiling, and the Vice President has publicly suggested that he has already reached

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his. In comments to the press last year, Kalla memorably declared that it would be foolhardy to challenge Yudhoyono because the President was tall, handsome and Javanese, while Kalla was short, ugly, and from Sulawesi. (Note: Conventional wisdom holds that Javanese--by far the largest ethnic grouping--would never support a non-Javanese candidate for president.) Kalla has also no doubt seen the polls, all of which show SBY holding a commanding lead over Kalla in a potential race. In fact, just last week one such poll measuring support for 10 possible presidential contenders showed SBY with 35 percent support, while Kalla came in a distant seventh with only three percent.

¶7. (S) Not only would a presidential run appear to be a difficult mission, but many contacts have suggested the Vice President would actually prefer to stay in his current job. Kalla's business interests have flourished during the last few years and any cost benefit analysis on a possible presidential bid would surely factor in these interests. Besides, at least one contact vigorously maintains that all is well between the President and Vice President. According to Gembong Priyono, Kalla and SBY enjoy a good rapport and work well together because "they both have the country's best interests at heart."

THE FATES WILL DECIDE

¶8. (S) Regardless of what the Vice President decides to do, his fate may ultimately be out of his hands. Several contacts report that President Yudhoyono is actively considering other VP candidates. No Mission contacts claim to have an authoritative read on who may be in the running. To be sure, influential First Lady Kristiani Herawati will undoubtedly wish to leave her mark on the VP decision whichever way it goes (Ref B).

¶9. (C) Another key factor in determining Kalla's political future will be his party's performance in the 2009

parliamentary elections. If Golkar retains a majority of the seats in the legislative elections, several Golkar contacts have said the party likely will feel compelled to nominate its own presidential candidate, regardless of the prospects for victory. In such a scenario, Kalla could be faced with a stark decision: serve as Golkar's presidential "sacrificial lamb," or surrender the reins to the party and try to continue his association with the President, despite his reduced political value.

¶10. (C) Kalla clearly faces an uncertain future. He is an ambitious, dynamic personality, and ideally would like to move up the ladder. Unfortunately for him, the final step is the most difficult one and though he is talented politically, Indonesian national politics are simply not built to favor "outer islanders." While Kalla would probably settle for another chance to play second fiddle to the President, he may not have much of a say in the matter.

HUME